

St Marc Grenoble
Sunday 7th November 2021 (3rd before Advent)
Jonah 3: 1 - 5, 10
Mark 1: 14 - 20
'The Time is Fulfilled'

PRAY

Good Morning! ... (*Wait for response*)

It's interesting, isn't it? When somebody greets us pleasantly, we usually respond, almost automatically, and in a similar way. One of the things I like about living in France is that, wherever you meet people, they usually greet you - politely.

And I have watched as people come into church, when the wardens and ushers greet you, most of you respond amicably. Probably those who don't are still recovering from getting out of bed too early, on the wrong side!

Even when people greet us in a less friendly manner, we will usually give them some sort of response – but that may be not be quite so polite!

Both our readings this morning are about 'Call' ... and 'Response'; I hope you can see how these stories, both over two thousand years old and hundreds of years apart, clearly relate to us.

Let's look at Jonah's story first. I love this story – it has so many parallels with my own.

Unfortunately, we only heard a tiny clip of it this morning. God was calling Jonah for a second time. Jonah's response to God's first call had been to try and run away in the opposite direction!

God was not going to let him get away with that. God had work for Jonah to do ... it seems Jonah was the best man for the job ... so, God wasn't going to let him off the hook!

God had called Jonah to be His prophetic representative in the big, bad city of Ninevah. But, Jonah decided he'd rather go in a different direction; and he tried to run away, jumping on a ship bound for somewhere else.

However, God showed in the most dramatic way, with the help of a tropical storm, and a great granddaddy of 'Jaws', that He is neither to be underestimated, nor ignored.

After being literally thrown off the ship, Jonah was abducted by a huge fish and unceremoniously dumped - puked up - back on the beach. That escapade brought Jonah firmly back to his senses; and back into very clear, two-way communication with God!!

Who says the Old Testament is either boring, or irrelevant? Not me! I can relate to so much of that story... Does it ring bells of recognition with you??

When God called Jonah the second time ... and gave him his marching orders, Jonah decided it was much wiser to do what God wanted – even if he didn't fancy the job – which he definitely didn't, and despite the fact that he was a country boy, and hated big towns like Ninevah, or Marseille, or even Grenoble for that matter!

Jonah thought he knew that the people wouldn't respond to God's call, so why waste time bothering with them? It would be much quicker just to destroy the Ninevites outright; with a massive bolt of lightning, or a plague or some other miracle of vengeance.

But, to Jonah's amazement, and his annoyance, the people of Nineveh did listen to what God had sent him to tell them, they did repent and they turned from their wicked ways; and, as a result, the city was saved from destruction.

Jonah was really annoyed, he'd so much wanted to see them get their come-uppance! I also suspect that he was rather embarrassed that the Ninevites had responded promptly to God's call, when he, at first, hadn't.

Now, let's look at our New Testament story ... Here, we meet Jesus, very early in His ministry announcing that it is time to "Repent, and believe the good news!" Repent = Change direction, turn around

What is the good news? - 'The time has come, the kingdom of God is near.'

That's very easy for us to say, and then carry on; but the Jewish people had been waiting for the Messiah for hundreds of years.

This was the moment of His arrival, but most of the people He called simply weren't prepared or ready or willing to respond.

But, the story we read this morning is about a group of people – who, like the Ninevites, and against all the odds, were prepared to respond.

Simon, or Peter as we know him best, and his brother Andrew; and then moments later James and John, were so captivated by Jesus, and the call He gave them, that they responded instantly.

We see they were prepared to give up everything, and follow Jesus.

Have you ever wondered, as I have, what made them literally drop everything they were doing, to follow Jesus?

Well, I'm fairly certain this wasn't the first time they had met Jesus – if you doubt that, read John 1 from v. 35. One writer I read suggests that this was not the first time they received a call to salvation, but it was the first time they were called to discipleship.

I don't know about you, but I find that explanation helpful; because I can personally relate to that. It was not when I came back to faith as a Christian that Jesus called me to serve Him full time but, in my case, a few years later.

And, why do you think that Jesus would want to call these fishermen to work with Him? Well, it seems they had a thriving business, with hired help, so they were successful in their previous work. As fishermen they were certainly not afraid of hard work, they were used to tough conditions and they were determined and persistent.

And they were obviously captivated by the “Good News of God”, which we're told Jesus was proclaiming.

Jesus called them to be “fishers of people”, and they responded to His call; they were the first disciples Jesus called – there were some more to follow.

And, in case you are in any doubt, Jesus continues to call people to this day.

This week we have Remembrance Day – when we remember those who, over the years have responded to what Jesus described as the greatest calling of all – to give up their lives for their friends.

We remember with grateful thanks, those who have been called to the ultimate sacrifice, in the hope that we, their children and successors, would be free from tyranny and oppression.

Sadly, tyranny and oppression still abound, often in different ways than our forebears expected; but, at least in this country, every one of us is free to respond to the call to follow Jesus.

There is no doubt that we are still called; but, sadly, too few of us respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel.

So , too few of the people who most need it, hear the Good News. Good news that they can be free from the tyrannies of oppression, materialism, poverty, addictions and hopelessness - The Good News of Jesus.

Today is the third Sunday before Advent – Advent is a time for reflection, for penitence and for preparation.

It is very important, as we prepare our hearts for Advent, that we should reflect on how Jesus may be calling us; and we should seriously begin praying about our personal response.

So, now as I close, let's pray:

*Gracious and loving Lord God,
Thank you for these stories of how you have called your people in different ways over many years. Help us to be ready to hear your call and to be willing to respond.
For Jesus' sake. Amen*